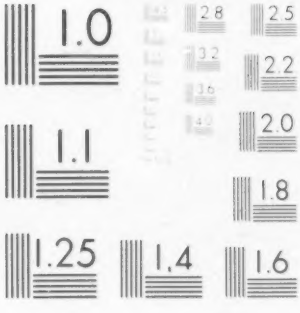

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ABSTRACT

Brief descriptions of recent research in early childhood moral development and the author's own hypotheses about the relevance of moral development theory on early childhood classrooms and curricula are provided. The three recent research studies focus on young children's development of a capacity for empathy, social perspective, and sense of justice. According to the author, positive reinforcement for thoughtful ways of dealing with conflicts provides a home and classroom environment conducive to learning. Adult verbalization in moral development helps the child bridge the gap between the awareness of his own feelings and his awareness of the feelings of others. When language underscores the child's experiences and when the message is consistent with the social behavior the child sees around him, the language undoubtedly contributes to social learning. A stable, consistent, and accepting environment can help the child learn about fairness even though the teacher makes no overt effort to teach about justice. Finally, since television is often the child's primary view of society, moral education in school must consist of guided discussion of information and misinformation from television viewing. (Author/DE)

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Social Interaction and the Development of a Sense of Right and Wrong in Young Children

Presented at the Symposium
on Human Values and Social Processes
in Early Childhood Education

National Council for the Social Studies
College and University Faculty Association

November 26, 1975
Atlanta, Georgia

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When our committee planned the theme for today's CUFA meeting I said that I would try to prepare a paper about Socialization and the Development of a Sense of 'Right" and "Wrong" in Young Children. I felt that such a topic was central to this year's conference theme on Human Values and the Human Condition. I felt we needed to focus on how the young child begins to develop a sense of justice, not only to give us a rationale for classroom practice, not only to illuminate this aspect of early childhood development, but also - I believe - because the reasoning of young children represents to some extent the modes of response to issues of fairness and justice that are accessible to us all our lives,

I have an absolutely unscientific hunch that not only does a capacity to reason about fairness and justice develop in an invarient sequence, but that the abandonment of rationality in conflict situations involving justice collapses in on itself in reverse sequence, when social pressure and fear become a part of the picture. I am hypothesizing that people revert to more and more simplistic ways dealing with conflict when they are threatened with actual or perceived harm to themselves. Perhaps this reversal of modes of reasoning, this telescoping backwards also becomes a factor when the number of variables that the adults have to consider becomes so numerous or complex that they can no longer sort them out.

If we find that adults can reason about theoretical dilemmas at one level, but that their behavior and rationalizations under stress are at a much more child-like level, then our awareness of the stage levels between practice and

theory may help us in two ways: (1) We may be able to gauge the degree of anxiety and inability to handle stress from the number of stages between the level of practice and theory; (2) Our knowledge of how children are helped to move upwards along the stage continuum may help us to develop techniques that are successful with adults.

I'd like to begin by sharing with you some very recent studies about the development of a capacity for empathy, for the taking of social perspectives, and for the development of the rudiments of a sense of justice. Two of the three studies that I will describe have appeared in print only this year and one is still in manuscript form ready to go to press. Actually, I had access to none of these three papers when I wrote the proposal for today's symposium. As you can see then, my committment to come here today was a pure act of faith. I felt we were on the brink of new research in the growth of moral development in early childhood.

I have been a student of moral development theory for about eight years, but I have been a parent, a teacher and a teacher of teachers for much longer than that. In the second half of my presentation I would like to share with you my hypotheses about the relevance of moral development theory on early childhood classrooms and curricula. I will try to show the ways in which a wholesome classroom climate affects moral development, the role that teacher verbalization may have in this development, and how I see the role of the school in the broader social setting in which the young child lives.

I <u>Theories of Moral Development</u>:

Piaget has postulated that the roots of the child's concepts of right and wrong probably start in infancy. The repetition and regularity of the infant's self-initiated play is probably the precursor of a respect for the regularity that rules children's games, and leads finally to a respect for social and moral codes in broader social interactions. Empathy is another

aspect of moral development that has its roots in infancy. Empathy is an involuntary, at times forceful, experiencing of another person's emotional state, and the infant is capable of empathic distress long before he has developed a sense of self or a sense of the "other". A capacity for taking the social perspective of other persons is yet another aspect of social and moral development; one that combines both cognition and affect, and may be a connecting link between the growth of moral judgment and its congruence with moral behavior.

All classroom practice must have its intellectual underpinnings in a theory of human development. A stage theory for such development has been the greatest contribution of researchers such as Piaget and Kohlberg, and has served as a springboard for a sudden upsurge of theoretical and practical studies by others in the field of cognition and the development of moral judgment. But early childhood education has not had a stage theory for moral development. Piaget last addressed himself to the development of moral judgment in 1925, and Kohlberg still puts the child under six into the limbo Stage 0.

I think early childhood educators can take pride in the kind of social environment and curriculum that is traditionally offered to nursery school and kindergarten children, but such programs have lacked a developmental rationale for the understanding of the child's capacity to feel and reason about behavior that has social consequences. Without such rationale teachers must use a "buckshot approach" - must try a little of all the things that might possibly work.

As I see it, the good news for early childhood educators is that within the last year, stage theories for the three most important aspects of moral development have been published. These are: (a) a stage theory for the growth of empathy, sympathy, altruism and guilt by Martin Hoffman of

Michigan State University,[1] (b) a stage theory for social perspective taking developed by Robert Selman of Harvard University,[2] (c) and a stage theory developed by William Damon of Clark University in Massachussetts for positive justice stages in the young child which precede and/or define in greater detail the early stages of moral reasoning described by Lawrence Kohlberg,[3]

A. Empathic feelings and perspective-taking capacity in moral development.

Hoffman points out that the infant is capable of empathic distress long before he has developed a sense of self or a sense of the other, and that an innate capacity for empathy as well as agression has greater survival value for the species than agression alone would have. Empathy is a conditioned, passive, involuntary response - based on the "pull of surface cues associated with elements of one's past". The transformation of empathic into sympathetic distress occurs in three stages which are tied to three levels of cognitive apprehension of the other. How does the child move from this empathic distress to sympathy and helping behavior: Sympathy begins when the child has a sense of the "other" as a physical entity. At that point he senses the other's distress but does not know what causes it.

The first level of sympathetic distress is almost as primitive as the involuntary empathic distress; it is a passive, involuntary, sometimes grossly inaccurate and transitory response to cues perceptually similar to those associated with one's own distress. It is a significant advance, however, because of the child's desire to help. The second stage is one of genuine role-taking. The child has a sense of the other not only as a physical entity, but as a source of feelings in his own right. At this stage the child is more conscious of the tentative nature of his projections, uses trial and

error and corrective feedback to modify his initial assumpations.

How early do children exhibit role-taking skill? Many children, under six fail in laboratory tests of role-taking, probably because they cannot keep the details of the hypothetical stories in mind. However, Hoffman suggests that certain types of role-taking in familiar and highly motivating natural settings may precede the more complex forms investigated in the laboratory by several years. He cites some charming anecdotes to make his point. One such example illustrates role-taking capacity, although not in the service of altruistic behavior: At twenty months Marcy coveted a toy her older sister was holding. Knowing that the sister's favorite toy was a rocking horse, Marcy went to pet the toy horse, loudly acclaiming: "Nice horsie." Marcy had assessed the situation correctly, for as soon as the sister saw her with the rocking horse, she abandoned the coveted toy to reassume supremacy over the horse. Hoffman lists as the crucial variables for role-taking in the preschool years: intense motiviation, familiarity with the other person and the physical surroundings, and corrective feedback.

A third stage in empathic and sympathetic capacity is achieved when the child can think of his own and other person's identity as contiuous persons; when he can imagine the general condition of another. Research into the development of sexual and racial identity indicates that a firm sense of the permanence of these distinctions come at age seven or above. This corresponds to the Piapetian timetable for multiple categorization and capacity for conservation.

Selman's work falls within a structural-developmental framework. He examines children's stages of social perspective-taking in terms of the structure

of social understanding, rather than the content. He analyzes children's ability to conceive the subjective perspectives of others, rather than the accuracy with which they grasp the feelings of others. The stages refer to qualitative new ways of thinking, not to overnight change, and they should be seen as consolidations or clarification of a concept, not as signposts of their emergence.

Selman identifies the following sequential levels of perspective-taking*

TABLE 1

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE-TAKING LEVELS [4)]

Level	Description
0	Egocentric perspective taking Although the child can identify superficial emotions in other people, he often confuses other's perspective with his own. He does not realize others may see a social situation differently from the way he does.
1	Subjective perspective taking Child begins to understand that other people's thoughts and feelings may be the same or different from his. He realizes that people feel differently or think differently because they are in different situations or have different information.
2	Self-reflective perspective taking The child is able to reflect on his own thoughts and feelings. He can anticipate other's perspective on his own thoughts and feelings and realize that this influences his perspective on others.
3	Mutual perspective taking The child can assume a third-person point of view. He realizes that in a two-person interaction each can put himself in the other's place and view himself from that vantage point before deciding how to react.
4	Qualitative-system perspective taking The adolescent conceptualizes subjective perspectives of persons toward one another to exist not only

on the level of mutual expectiations, but also on deeper levels. Perspectives between persons are seen as forming a network or system. There are multiple levels of perspective taking and multiple systems of perspectives.

5 Symbolic interaction perspective taking

Perspective taking is seen as a method for the analysis of interpersonal and social relations. Due to the nature of human subjectivity itself, one does not necessarily "know" the other's perspective as content. Mutual understanding occurs through the use of similar processes of social reasoning.

While Selman uses hypothetical dilemmas both as tests for social perspective taking level and as curriculum content for peer interaction he emphasizes that our basic educational goal is to help children apply the perspective taking they have to various areas of social behavior. Just as children need to exercise their reading and math skills, they must also exercise their social and logical abilities across a wide range of situations. Perhaps the most important point to make with regard to educational practice, is that the application of social perspective taking ability to the child's performance across a range of social behaviors is not an automatic process."[5)]

B. Positive Justice Shapes in Early Childhood.

William Damon analyzed three conceptual areas which seem central in a child's moral world. These are: (1) concerns of "positive justice," including problems like how to distribute property fairly, how and under what conditions one should share with others, how one should trust friends, etc.; (2) concerns of authority, including problems like whom one should obey (and under what conditions), the meaning to the child of power and obedience relations, etc.; and (3) concerns of responsibility and blame, including problems like what constitutes a bad act, who is to blame, what is the nature and extent of one's obligations to others, and what constitutes just retri-

bution for doing wrong."[6]

Damon used both hypothetical dilemmas and real situations that posed practical problems with children aged four years and older. From these he developed a series of sub-stages for the emergence of concepts of positive justice which he labels Zero A & B, One A & B and Two A & B.

TABLE 1

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF POSITIVE JUSTICE STAGES[7]

STAGE 0

Substage 0-A: Positive justice choices derive from S's with that an act occur. Reasons simply assert the choices, rather than attempting to justify them, e.g., I should get it because I want to have it. S confuses fairness with his/her own desires.

Substage 0-B: Choices still reflect S's desires, but are now justified on the basis of external, observable realities such as size, sex, or other physical characteristics of persons, e.g., we should get the most because we're girls. Such justifications, however, are invoked in a fluctuating, a posteriori manner, and are self-serving in the end. S confuses fairness with niceness.

STAGE 1

Substage 1-A: Positive justice choices derive from notions of strict equality in actions, e.g., that everyone should get the same. Justifications are consistent with this principle, but are unilateral and inflexible. S confuses fairness with equality.

Substage 1-B. Positive justice choices derive from a notion of reciprocity in actions that persons should be paid back in kind for doing good or bad things. Notions of merit and deserving emerge. Justifications are unilateral and inflexible. S confuses fairness with dessert.

STAGE 2

Substage 2-A: A moral relativity develops out of the understanding that different persons can have different, yet equally valid, justifications for their claims to justice. Choices attempt quantitative compromises between competing claims, e.g., he should get the most but she should get some too. S confuses fairness with compromise.

Substage 2-B: S coordinates considerations of equality and reciprocity such that S's positive justice choices take into account the claims of various persons and the demands of the specific situation in relation to one another. Choices are firm and clear-cut, yet justifcations reflect the recognition that all persons should be given their due (though, in many situations, this does not mean equal treatment). S confuses fairness with satisfaction of all persons present.

II Implications of Moral Development Research for Early Childhood Programs

A. Creating a School Environment

As a student of moral development theory, I am convinced that (1) there is a hierarchy of levels of reasoning: (2) that human beings are capable of developing the increasingly comprehensive and complex ways of analyzing dilemmas and that (3) the inner drive to comprehend and organize experience is the greatest impetus to moral development.

As a parent and teacher, I know that positive reinforcement for thoughtful ways of dealing with conflicts provide a climate in which the child can expose himself to experiences from which he can learn. All of us who have worked with children have come to know that a child is more likely to risk himself in situations that may involve conflict and pain if he knows that adults will protect him from harm at the hands of others. Confidence to risk himself also depends on his sense of security that the adult will stop him from going too far if he himself lashes out in anger at others both in family and school situations. Similarly, the child who knows that he will be protected from ridicule can afford to speak out, can afford to assert himself without monitoring first what the possible effect of a spontaneous reaction will be.

I know of no studies that have compared the number of instances in a day in which a child who is confident of being accepted and protected is willing to risk himself, versus a child who has learned to be cautious in relations with other children and adults. On a cumulative level, the difference between the two must be astronomical.

A capacity for self-restraint and for the postponing of immediate gratification are needed if the child is to move beyond an infantile response level. Those of us who have worked closely with children and have wathched this gradually developing capacity for the postponment of immediate gratification, are likely to agree that children who are used to having their basic physical and emoticnal needs met, will probably develop this capacity a little sooner than children who have been physically or emotionally deprived.

B. The Functions of Adult Verbalization in Moral Development

It is very likely that it is helpful to the child if he has a language label for feelings of which he is just becoming aware. It is also very likely that language and language labels can help to make the bridge between the child's awareness of his own feelings and his awareness of the feelings of others. The capacity for role-taking probably is dependent at least as much on a capacity for empathy as a whole-body response, as it is on the rational language linked component. But, language can undoubtedly be a helpful complement and supplement to the capacity for role taking.

Verbalization and simple rationalization may be valuable even when the child does not understand the adult's message. The child may still be learning the more important lesson that people have reasons for their behavior, and that such reasons are important to them. Furthermore, the giving of reasons for our behavior and feelings is one aspect of the respect we give to other human beings. "Giving reasons" is a cornerstone of civilized social interaction. "Having reasons" is an integral part of any conception of justice.

When we compare the influence of talking to children about "right" and "wrong" with other - non-verbal - kinds of teacher behavior, it is well-known that behavior speaks louder than words. However, when language underscores the child's experiences and when the message is consistent with the social behavior the child

sees around him, then language undoubtedly contributes to social learning.

C. Modeling and Consistency of Expectiations in Moral Development

The likelyhood of socially acceptable behavior increases with the consistency in the child's environment. On the other hand, the development of a capacity for reasoning about justice may occur to a greater extent when the child finds that there are some exceptions to the rules. Every real-life situation probably holds in it enough conflict and confusion to give the child this necessary food for thought. Even when adults are scrupulously "fair", the system breaks down when other children do not abide by the rules. I hardly think we need to worry about having an environment outside of the laboratory that is so consistent that the child is unaware of conflicts and alternatives. However, we unfortunately see many instances of the opposite extreme, when the child sees so many exceptions to the "rule" that he despairs of finding a pattern.

In recent years, criticism of the schools has been rife, and for many people it has become a comfortable assumption that it is in the school that children find disorganization and lack of standards, while the home in contrast provides a loving environment in which "moral standards" are learned. It would be well to remember that many parents today are so preoccupied with their own problems that the opportunities for guiding their children's informal learning about interpersonal relationships are all too frequently missed. For lots of kids, good things won't happen unless they happen in school. For many children school is a haven from adult neglect and impulsive behavior. A stable and accepting environment can help the child to learn about fairness and right and wrong through social experiences, even when the teacher makes no overt effort to teach about justice.

D. Providing Perspective for the Child

Many people look back nostalgically to a simpler society in which school restricted itself to the learning of the three "R's". However, in that simpler society, the adults as well as the children were not exposed to a constant bombardment by stimuli, were not constantly exposed to problems over which they have little direct control. In our earlier, simpler world, adults and children had a much more concrete sense of cause and effect than the younger generation has been able to develop today.

The school today has to make a deliberate effort to protect the young child from being engulfed by too many undigested experiences. This is one reason why we cannot afford to ignore the influence of television on young children. Because children watch such large amounts of television without adult interpretation, I believe that teachers at school must help children to sort out and re-evaluate emotional misinformation as well as factual misinformation.

We have become very much aware of the potential harmful effects of violence on television, of the fragmentation of children's attention, of the lack of demand that the medium makes on children to increase their attention span. But there are other potential effects of television whose influence have hardly begun to be explored. To use just one example: Do we know what effect the laugh tracks on television programs have on children's developing sense of humor or on children's developing sense of sympathy for people in distress? Here is an instance, where a device, was developed to create a sense of audience participation in studio produced programs, by people who had no intention of influencing one or more aspects of moral development. Nevertheless, I think we should look long and hard to see what the effect on children may be when they repeatedly hear canned laughter in situations where sympathy might be the appropriate

reaction in real life. Adults sometimes laugh in situations that have an unexpected or negative element, but in real life children get many non-verbal cues from adults which correct the initial impression that another person's misfortune is funny. The stereotypes of situation comedies and the simplistics of cartoons carry no such corrective message.

Television is often the child's primary view of "society". It is a passive view, but it is the first. And it is in this view of society that some young children first experience broken promises. Toys advertised on TV fail to live up to their promise. Sales pitches are exaggerated; too many products claim to be "the best". After "promising" to show a children's T.V. Special, the young viewer may find the time spot pre-empted by a football game. Then within a few years, as soon as the child's mind registers part of the news programs he overhears, the child will be overwhelmed by stories of lawlessness and crime.

We cannot shield children from these experiences. But part of their moral education in school can consist of guided discussions built on the child's information and misinformation from television viewing. Teachers can help children to see that adults have reasons for what they do. The decisions that are based on these reasons may not be pleasing to many children or adults, and may not seem "fair". Neverthless, people--even the people on T.V., have reasons for what they do.

It is important for children to realize that adults are also concerned about "fairness" and "right" and "wrong". It is important for children to see that adults can cope with major and minor injustices around them; that adults can be angry or disappointed but not lose control; that adults have positive ways for trying to redress injustice.

The first years of school can show the child that this society can care, that this society can deal justly and with mercy. The child can learn this in countless incidental ways, but because this idea is so important, we as teachers should seek out ways to say it as well as show it.

Just as a fish presumably is not aware of being in the water, the toddler at home may be unaware of the fact that there are social alternatives to the behavior to which he has become habituated. In that sense, the nursery school or other first school experience is for many children the first time and place in which they may gain social perspective. Some of the lessons children must learn are by no means easy. But, the very fact that the school is a new set of glasses through which to view the universe is a golden opportunity for teachers to give children a feeling that the world is a good place; a world in which people can and should deal fairly with each other.

Footnotes:

1) Hoffman, Martin - The Development of Empathy, Sympathy, Altruism and Guilt. Chapter 7 in T. Likona (ed.), Morality: Theory, Research and Practice. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston (in press).

2) Selman, Robert - A Developmental Approach to Interpersonal and Moral Awareness in Young Children: Some Theoretical and Educational Implications of Levels of Perspective-Taking. pp. 127-140 in Meyer, J., Burnham, B. and Cholvat, C. (eds.) Value Education: Theory Practice, Problems, Prospects. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurie Press, 1975.

3) Damon, William - Studying Early Moral Development: Some Techniques for Interviewing Young Children and Analyzing the Results. pp. 25-40 in Meyer, J., Burnham B. and Cholvat, C. (eds.) Value Education: Theory Practice, Problems, Prospects. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurie Press, 1975.

4) Selman, p. 128

5) Ibid. p. 134

6) Damon, p. 26

7) Ibid. p. 30-1